

240203 - Unlock Democracy Council Minutes

The meeting was held online

Attendance

Council

Catherine Bearder, Stephen Carter (part of the meeting), Antony Frost, Stephen Gosling, Peter Hirst, Jess Metheringham, Maggie Nelmes, Jane Reed, Vicky Seddon, Jacob Webb, Luke Williams, Rebecca Warren

Staff

Grace Barnett (part of the meeting), Tom Brake, Steve Gilmore (part of the meeting)

Apologies

Council

Stuart Hill, Claire Bonham

Staff

Alice Jeffrey, Simon Howard, Shaun Roberts

Chair's report

JM's report was tabled and noted.

Director's report

TB's report was tabled and a discussion was held.

PH suggested co opting people to the Council and giving them voting rights. JM explained the constitution would need amending to allow co optees to vote

AF said a massive campaign to raise the profile of PR would be needed because of low levels of awareness. TB agreed.

LW said the Unlock Democracy Merseyside and West Cheshire group wants to see more local UD groups. TB explained that this would be very resource intensive and UD is working through organisations which have local groups instead, although UD would support anyone who wanted to establish a local group.

JW asked about the employment of the R2PR staff. TB explained that they would be formally employed by UD but would be accountable to the R2PR Steering Group.

Head of Membership and Database's report

GB spoke to her report.

Director of Campaigns and Digital's report

GB also spoke to SR's report, highlighting that 10 times as many people emailed their MP this week compared to when we did it for the first time: 5,000 vs 500!

CB asked about stretch targets. These will be reviewed before the 1st April. TB confirmed UD is campaigning on overseas constituencies. TB confirmed the local govt report should be completed within the next few weeks. The text is complete, it needs to be artworked now by Compass.

RW drew attention to Change.org which has a petition on the honours system.

AF was worried about dark money in politics. GB drew attention to our Think tank campaign. TB drew attention to our work with Transparency International and meeting with Dan Jarvis MP.

Action SC and TB to talk re Dan Jarvis's areas of interest

Action TB to check whether Sheffield responded to the Council Leaders' survey.

PH was worried about corruption in local govt. TB confirmed UD will support other organisations but cannot lead on this issue (so as to avoid being overstretched).

Action TB to contact True and Fair (and other parties) over working together on corruption issues

Campaigns' officer report


TB spoke to AJ's report

Press officer report

SG spoke to his report.
SG outlined the difficulties in placing proactive PR stories.
SG is producing a messaging guide for PR to help land stories

Dashboard

The team were congratulated on the huge progress (visible in the dashboard) made since March 2021.

 UD dashboard - 2023-2024

Minutes

Council

The minutes were approved unanimously

 230902 - Draft Minutes with links

Management Board

The minutes from 230920 and 240119 were noted

Matters Arising

TB explained that the administration associated with running a 500 club meant the team would not be pursuing this as a fundraising opportunity.

GB confirmed there is a UD webinar on AI on the 6th Feb 2024 at 12 noon.

TB explained our accountants are working on financial scenarios for the GIR property (eg do we sell the commercial property or retain it with a smallish mortgage). This analysis is expected to be completed by April to enable an informed discussion to take place before the GIR project is complete.

Dates of next meetings

13 April: Council Meeting 10 am - 2 pm online

20 July: Council Meeting 10 am - 5 pm hybrid

Finance

A deficit of around 67K is forecast by year end. This is slightly higher than anticipated, but not a source of concern with the successful completion of the GIR project in sight.

The P+L and Balance Sheet and Management Accounts and 23/24 budget were tabled.

The budget for 24-25, 25-26, 26-27 is being worked up in time to be signed off by the end of March.

CB asked that it was minuted that the staff team is doing an excellent job.

Rodell

SG provided a written update. Two significant problems: penetrating damp from a neighbour's property and RIFs (Requests for Information) are piling up. SHoward is on the case.

The Management accounts Q2 Jul - Sep 23 and November P+L and Balance Sheet were tabled.

Discussion re naming of Grays Inn Road property

A written report setting out the background was tabled.

A discussion took place regarding naming 37 Grays Inn Road.

VS, RW, JR wanted to keep it as 37 (no name)

CB wanted a name - Central House (Freedom House) - and didn't want to involve members

PH suggested Transparency House

JR wanted a plaque inside saying something about the history of 37, rather than a name.

SG pointed out that properties with names sell better. SG suggested Central Books House. SG will place a picture of the old frontage of 37 Grays Inn Road in the common parts of 37. SG also proposed Antony Barnett house.

LW wanted a name, suggested Unlock Democracy if UD keeps the commercial unit.

AF asked whether UD could rent out the flats rather than sell. SG explained this was not UD's approach but if the housing market collapsed (and the rental market didn't), this might be considered

VS, CB wanted Charter House

VS requested a vote on whether to stick with 37 and have no name for the property. The vote was held, with VS voting in favour, 7 against and 2 abstentions. VS proposal was therefore defeated.

Action TB and JM to send round an email to UD Council members and Rodell members (who are not on UD's Council) with a poll on the name (including no name as an option).

UD Council Election

A report was tabled, including the election timetable.

PH asked about the closing date of 22/4/24. TB explained that this was the date by which an email signing up as a member or letter had to be received. It was agreed there was no precise definition of young (when encouraging younger people to stand for Council).

RW asked whether there was an application form for people standing for council and whether the vote was by STV. The answer in both cases is yes.

Action TB and JM: identify a returning officer for the elections for the meeting on the 13th April.

Following a question from LW, TB confirmed UD will monitor the number of people standing for election (a problem was caused 2 years ago by people pulling out). **Action TB**

Action All Council members: let TB or JM know whether they intend standing again.

AF asked whether UD can check people's credentials to see whether all candidates are legitimate supporters? TB confirmed UD has a process for expelling people if they do not subscribe to UD's values and principles.

Action LW to look online at new members until the election

Action TB to circulate the current pack for candidates to Council members.

Action TB to check briefing for candidates to see what it says about attendance at meetings. It may be useful to highlight relevant sections from the constitution, rather than relying on people to read the whole constitution.

General Election

A written report was tabled.

PH suggested the Register Every Voter campaign should be the Register Every Eligible Voter campaign.

AF highlighted the difficulties registering young people. TB explained UD works with organisations like the Politics Project (and Shout Out UK, My Life My Say) which are best placed to work with and register young people.

JW confirmed students can be registered automatically at university.

JM confirmed people can vote in two or more local authorities as they are different elections, but only once in a General Election as it is the same election.

CB reminded members that there are Mayoral and PCC elections in May too

LW asked about resources to encourage people to register to vote. TB pointed out that the Electoral Commission has resources on its website, including for overseas voters.

PH suggested linking citizenship to voting. TB highlighted that automatic voter registration could register people when they obtain citizenship.

AOB

TB answered queries re UD's accounts raised earlier in the meeting.

AF asked what 'Consultancy' covered. TB explained that a budget of £1,500 for Communications Consultancy had been allowed for. This could have been used for instance if UD had wanted to pay a designer to produce some eye-catching graphics for one of UD's campaigns. So far this budget is unspent.

CB asked why there was a 67% variance in spend on IT Software & licences. TB confirmed this increase wasn't linked to anything specific. This heading covers Xero costs (our accountancy package), Zoom, cheeky monkey (our IT software suppliers). This budget will need increasing in 24/25 to reflect the current level of expenditure.

PH asked about the thresholds for approving spending on consultancy. TB explained that the Council approves the budget and monitors performance against the budget, and, after approval by the Management Board, approves budget variations above 10% or a minimum amount of £1,000.

The meeting closed at 12:54